

Chairman Kurtz and members of the Children, Families and Senior Services Committee – thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony to you today regarding the provision of child welfare services in Michigan and the value of the partnership between the public and nonprofit sectors. My name is Gary Tester and I am Chief Development Officer and Executive Vice President for Starr Commonwealth, one of the largest and oldest private, nonprofit providers of services to children and families in Michigan. In 1913 a young man named Floyd Starr purchased a ramshackle barn and forty scrub-covered acres in Albion, Michigan and began what would eventually become one of the nation's most respected child and family charities. Floyd Starr founded Starr Commonwealth as a refuge for "homeless, dependent, neglected and delinquent boys." It strives to change personal outcomes, one individual at a time.

Today, Starr Commonwealth operates dozens of programs for troubled youth and their families in Michigan and Ohio. "Uncle Floyd," as he was affectionately known, would probably be amazed at just how far his original vision has come, but he certainly wouldn't be surprised at the reasons why. Starr still believes, as did its founder, that when you treat a child with dignity and respect, it changes a child's heart. And that, in the end, is what changes a child's life. Starr has evolved into a provider of residential, community-based and training services reaching all 50 states and over 20 countries internationally. Starr is a member agency of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families as well as the national Alliance for Children and Families and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation.

I am also the President of the Board of Directors for the Michigan Federation of Children and Families, a membership organization representing over 40 of Michigan's nonprofit providers of services to children and families. Since its founding in 1969 the Federation has continuously endeavored to improve the delivery of services to children and families in Michigan through emphasis on quality, cost-efficient care and partnership between the public and nonprofit sectors.

Today, in this great state, the child welfare system rests on the brink of historic change. Specifically, as you know, the Department of Human Services and former Governor Granholm

were sued on behalf of children in the state's foster care system just a few years ago and the state entered into a consent decree in U.S. Federal Court to settle this case. This consent decree outlined a number of prescribed solutions and remedies the state agreed to pursue across the public and private sectors. Regrettably, the changes implemented in the first two years of the consent decree did not satisfactorily address the timelines and requirements of the consent decree, resulting in the state coming perilously close to a contempt of court action this past December. Through the efforts of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families and then Governor-elect Snyder and members of his team, federal Judge Nancy Edmunds was persuaded to provide the new administration an opportunity to renew efforts to implement the consent decree. This effort appears to have begun in a positive manner with meetings occurring between all concerned parties to establish a renewed energy regarding improvements.

It is in this atmosphere that the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, its member agencies and other nonprofit providers in the state are poised to be strong partners with the state in successfully caring for Michigan's most vulnerable children and families. Opportunities for partnering include:

- Training of nonprofit workers – a major cornerstone of the consent decree, training to this point has been the primary function of the Department of Human Services, in spite of the fact that budget boilerplate has, for years, called for DHS to allow nationally accredited nonprofit providers to train their own workers using “train the trainer” models developed with DHS.
- Data collection and analysis – another cornerstone of the consent decree, DHS continues to struggle with putting all of the components together to make the SACWIS system an effective one for the state and its nonprofit partners. Nonprofit agencies such as Starr have IT departments and evaluation teams that can assist DHS in designing, piloting and implementing meaningful data collection and analysis systems.
- Identification of service needs and program solutions – this is an area where DHS can draw upon the tremendous strength and experience of nonprofit providers to best

understand emerging needs of children and families, identify the types of services needed and then engage them in the design of those services. All of this can be done without compromising a nonprofit agency's ability to compete for contractual awards based upon the services that come forth from these types of discussions.

In summary, the nonprofit sector is a capable and responsive partner willing to commit time and resource to partner with DHS to improve this system and the services it provides to children and families. I will be honored to address any questions or concerns you might have.

Thank you.

